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PEAKS & LAMAS

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Peaks and Lamas

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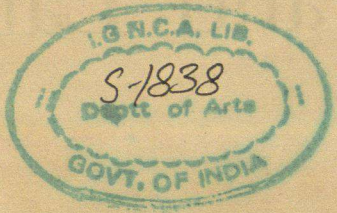

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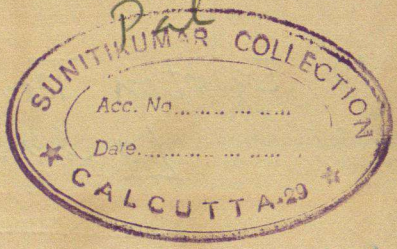

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Chapter XXII

The Presiding Idea

WHOEVER HAS HAD the patience to keep track, stage by stage, of the wanderings recorded in this book cannot fail to have gathered by now some kind of general impression of what life in one of the Tibetan countries consists of, both in respect of its outward conformation and even, to some extent, in respect of its essence. It goes without saying, however, that such a picture will remain incomplete in many ways; anything like a detailed analysis of the various stands that together go to weave the web of Tibetan life could only be undertaken after a prolonged stay in Tibet proper, where the civilization in question can be studied under its most typical as well as its most vigorous form.* Nevertheless, enough has been learned up to date to allow of a number of generalizations affecting the whole Tibetan world, since it is plainly evident that throughout its far-flung territories a certain type of human existence is recognizable, owing both its essential unity and its outward form to the influence of the selfsame tradition, having done so, moreover, for many centuries. One has but to compare the account contained in the biography of St. Mila Repa with what is to be seen today to become convinced of the extraordinary unity, as well as vitality, of Tibetan institutions. Apart from such changes as must come, almost imperceptibly, with the mere passage of time, the way in which people think, act, and speak and the standard by which they judge men and things do not appear to have altered in any very fundamental way since those early days, and the life of Mila Repa still provides the best-drawn picture of Tibetan life that exists, besides offering a most vivid commentary on that doctrine which, above all else, has given to that life both shape and direction.

The last remark calls for some additional comment, since it contains an allusion to a question of very wide import, one that

* Such a visit did in fact take place in 1947.

is of general applicability to all traditional civilizations and not merely to Tibet – namely, the question of what is the principle of discrimination between one form of the Perennial Wisdom and another, causing them to be externally distinct as well as consistent internally. For without the operation of some such principle there would be no excuse for a formal discontinuity as between the several traditions, serving as they all do as ways and means of attaining to the realization of one and the same universal Knowledge, from which every thought of distinction is manifestly to be excluded, whether of form or otherwise.

The fact is that every civilization that can be called authentic is endowed with a principle of unity peculiar to itself, which is reflected, in varying degrees, in all the institutions of the civilization in question. By a principle of unity is meant a predominant idea, corresponding to a given aspect of the truth, which has been recipient of particular emphasis and for the expressing of which, if one may so put it, that civilization shows a particular "genius." Emphasis on an aspect must, however, have its price: that is to say, the highlight of attention cannot be focused on one aspect of reality without producing its compensating shadows, affecting other aspects. Each separate formal embodiment of the traditional wisdom, therefore, corresponds, as it were, to a difference of intellectual perspective; and the key to the understanding of whatever is explicit or implicit in any given form resides in a thorough assimilation of the dominant idea running through that form – in other words, of its principle of unity.

In seeking to determine which is the principle of unity animating the Tibetan civilization one must beware of being satisfied with an easy answer, such as saying that this principle is no other than the Buddhist doctrine itself; for though this statement is correct as far as it goes, it lacks precision, failing as it does to indicate which one, out of a whole body of ideas comprised within the one doctrinal plan, has been recipient of that greater emphasis required for the moulding of an entire traditional structure according to a particular form, and, as it were, in its image. Though one knows that Buddhism, by imposing certain fundamental concepts, has become the rule of life over very wide areas extending from Ceylon to Japan, and that this has produced a certain community of outlook among all the peoples that have come within the Buddhist orbit, one cannot fail to recognize that in this general whole certain clearly dis-

tinguishable forms of civilization are to be found, the intellectual frontiers of which are ~~in no wise~~ not primarily determined by the Buddhist influence. The common presence of Buddhism does not, for instance, warrant one's placing the Chinese and Tibetan civilizations under one heading, even though they are next-door neighbours; and if Buddhism is admittedly a factor common to both, this fact has been insufficient to produce any very marked likeness in the two points of view, let alone identity.

The chief difference between them lies in the fact that whereas in Tibet the Buddhist tradition is everything, having completely replaced its *Bön-po* predecessor, in China Buddhism was something in the nature of a graft, admittedly a most timely and successful one, upon a civilization of which the pattern, in all essentials, had been already set before the arrival of the foreign influences. Since nothing in the existing Chinese form was found to be actually incompatible with the Buddhist point of view, the latest arrival from India found no difficulty in taking its place in the traditional life of the Far East on equal terms with its two other great constituents, namely Taoism, representative of an intellectuality so pure as to be adapted for the use of an exceptionally qualified "élite" only, and Confucianism, which is not, as is commonly supposed, a separate creation, still less a "religion," but which corresponds to that side of the Chinese tradition in which all without exception are able to participate, concerning itself as it does with social institutions and human relationships in general – the latter being given expression especially through its characteristic concepts of the race, the family, and the family ancestors. It might also be mentioned, in passing, that in the course of time Buddhism and Taoism engaged in many intellectual exchanges, some of which gave rise to that school, so rich in spiritual initiative, that is commonly known in the West under its Japanese name of *Zen*.

Similar considerations would ~~have~~ apply in India during the centuries when Hinduism and Buddhism coexisted there as separate currents of tradition: both continued to belong to the same civilization, the form of which had been laid down, under ~~purely~~ Hindu inspiration, at a time long anterior to the specific formulation of the Buddhist teachings. In any case, both in virtue of its origin and by the nature of its thought, Buddhism remains an Indian doctrine, having derived most of its basic conceptions, if not all, from the common root-stock of the Hindu metaphysic. It is not on that score that Buddhism can be called

original; nor, indeed, does it put forward any such claim, since the Buddha Himself always was at pains to repudiate, as a monstrous heresy, any suggestion that He had come to teach something new in the matter of doctrine; it is only modern Western writers, themselves imbued with individualistic prejudices, who have been determined at all costs to discover in Buddhism a radical innovation amounting to a revolt against the traditional spirit, and in the Buddha an early revolutionary working on Reformation lines.

Where Buddhism was highly original, however, was in respect of its methods, affecting both the way of expounding the principles and the form of the spiritual disciplines that went with that knowledge. Indeed, but for a large measure of originality in the manner of restating the eternal truths the Buddhist apostles would have been unable to carry out their appointed task of adapting the Indian metaphysic so as to render it eventually assimilable by non-Indian peoples, especially by the Yellow races, whose mentality was so very different from that of the Indians. This task once accomplished, however, Indian Buddhism had little further cause to exist as a separate form and gradually disappeared, gently subsiding back into that Hinduism whence it had sprung and from which, despite controversies on the surface, it had, at heart, never been entirely severed.

The Tibetan branch was one of the latest offshoots from the main stem of Buddhism, having only come into being during the seventh and eighth centuries after Christ, chiefly through the work of Indian monks from Bengal and Kashmir. While accepting all the basic ideas taught by the Buddha, which it continued to share with all the other peoples of similar spiritual allegiance, Tibet early developed certain clearly marked features of its own, to the point of giving rise to a distinct form of civilization, comparable, on every count, with the other principal traditional forms of the world. This is possibly due in part to the incorporation of such features of the previous *Bön-po* tradition as could be usefully readapted; it was on the face of it unlikely, however, that any element specific to a form actually in process of replacement by another would retain sufficient intrinsic vitality to provide a whole civilization with its principle of unity, in the sense given to that term at the beginning of this chapter – that is to say, with an idea both distinct and powerful enough to create and nourish its own forms, conferring on them the means for perpetuating their own charac-

ter through long ages and of impressing it firmly and unmistakably upon the face of things and upon the thoughts of men.

In fact, the idea that enjoys pride of place in the Tibetan tradition is one that figures in the Buddhist doctrine as originally introduced from India. This presiding idea, colouring the outlook of sage and simple peasant alike (as we were repeatedly enabled to observe during our journeys), is the conception of Bodhisattvahood, the state of the fully awakened being who, though under no further constraint by that Law of Causality which he has transcended, yet freely continues to espouse the vicissitudes of the Round of Existence in virtue of his Self-identification with all the creatures still involved in egocentric delusion and consequent suffering. Such an attitude must not, however, be confused with a kind of sentimental "altruism" in the social sense; indeed, a moment's reflection will show that one who has finally been set free from the false notion of a permanent "I," and who individually experienced, is at the same time automatically rid of its correlative notion of "other." The Bodhisattva behaves as he does precisely because, for him, any kind of conceptual polarization is inoperative, because, to his singleness of eye, all contrasted pairs such as the Round and Nirvana, Bondage and Deliverance, Material Substance and Spirit, together with all the subsidiary oppositions born of such contrasts, are alike resolved in the unity – or, as the Tibetans would say, in the "two-lessness" – of That which he himself realizes as the All-Principle (Tibetan *Kun-ji*), the eternal Cause and ground of all phenomenal existence.*

The Bodhisattva's compassion, or what in human language is described as such, translates into individually intelligible terms the universal "non-altruity" of his point of view: even while in Nirvana he experiences the world, according to that measure of reality which belongs to it – and one must not forget that suffering, in the deepest sense of the word, is inseparable from the very fact of becoming, which cannot in any sense be experienced without it. Likewise, even when dwelling in the midst of a changeful world, he does not cease to know the changeless bliss of Nirvana, and if to us the two experiences seem distinct and mutually exclusive, they are not so to the possessor of true insight, because such a one never feels tempted to abstract one

* It is not difficult to recognize the likeness – nay, more, the virtual identity – of this doctrine with that of the Hindus on the subject of *Ātmān*, the universal Self; this in spite of various attempts made, by modern scholars and others, to oppose Buddhism and Hinduism on this score, by persistently misapplying the fundamental Buddhist teaching about the "non-selfhood" of all conditioned existence.

or other of them from the unity of their common and transcendent principle, so that, from his point of view, they are not even conceivable apart. Thus the Bodhisattva, through a perfect realization of his own essential identity with all beings, thereby suffers with them and for them, as the eternal victim self-immolated upon the altar of their existence; but even in that suffering itself he perceives the joy unspeakable – both the light and its inseparable shadows alike yield up their closest-guarded secret under the scrutiny of his incorruptible impartiality.*

The status of a Bodhisattva has been defined (though, strictly speaking, the very word "definition," implying as it does the idea of limitation, is here inapplicable) as that of one who realizes Wisdom as Knowledge of the Void, and Method as Universal Compassion; the first-named representing the purely transcendent aspect of his realization, while the second implies an unblurred recognition of the Face of Divinity even through the veil of separativity, as constituted by the worlds – in other words, a not merely theoretical but an effective awareness that the transcendent aspect of Truth is not other than the immanent and vice versa. Thus, if the being is first called upon to seek "deliverance" from form and its restrictions in order to become awake to that reality which dwells "beyond names and forms," yet, in the deepest sense of all, it can be said, following the *Lankavatara Sutra,* that there is really nothing to be acquired, nothing to be delivered from, no Way, no Goal, no Round, no *Nirvana,* nor indeed anything needing to be done or undone. However, lest this kind of paradoxical statement, so common in the Mahāyānist writings, should be unconsciously twisted into an excuse for taking up a "quietist" position, it is well to remember that the knowledge in question itself implies the most intensely "active" attitude conceivable, a concentration so impenetrable that it is a matter of indifference to its pos-

* A parallel, though one very different in its formal expression, can be established by reference to Christian theology, in that it can be said that the ultimate goal of the Christian life consists in giving complete effect to the Doctrine of the Two Natures, central theme of the Christian tradition as such, whereby Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, and the Glorified Christ eternally seated at the right hand of Power are simultaneously realized as one and not two; or, in other words, the Christ who suffered crucifixion temporally upon the tree at Calvary and upon the cross of His own incarnation as a finite being, and indeed cosmically upon the very fact of Creation itself, and that Word of God by whom all things were made, though they respectively suggest notions of blissfulness and suffering that to the eye of ignorance seem mutually exclusive or, at best, successively realizable, are essentially inseparable conceptions neither of which can be fully realized in isolation from the other.

sessor whether he happens to find himself in the most secluded of mountain retreats or is engaged on exemplary and redemptive work among the crowded habitations of men, or else in one of the heavens – or the hells. His is not a solitude that depends on any special conditions of place or time, true solitude being indeed but another name for that Voidness which is also the Fullness, a first-fruit of that self-naughting which is also self-knowing.

Three levels are broadly distinguishable in respect of the comprehension of Reality: First, things may be regarded from the point of view of Ignorance, which is that of the ordinary man, concerned as he is with appearances and with his own reactions to them. It is he, the "common man," held up to flattery in our day as if he were a very pattern of humanity, who is the pathetic dreamer, the incorrigible sentimentalist, the romantic, in contrast to the spiritual man, now at a discount, who is the only true realist, the "practical man" in the widest sense of the word. From an ignorant or "profane" point of view things are considered under the aspect of separativity only, and treated as if they were self-contained entities; that is to say, as if each of them were "carrying within itself its own sufficient cause." Under such circumstances the manifested world appears in the guise of an unresolvable multiplicity, in which the individualization and consequently the opposition of persons or things (through their mutual limitation and inescapable competition) is raised to the highest possible power, thus spelling insecurity and suffering for all concerned; such being, moreover, the inevitable fruit of dualism, of participation in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Secondly, one has the view that comes with an awakening perception of the fallacy underlying the world and its formal appearances. In that case the disillusioned being seeks deliverance in the formlessness of the Unmanifest, where all things subsist unchanged and unchangeable within the bosom of their parent cause, in a state that might be described as one of permanent actuality, whence their coming out to be manifested in one of the worlds can only partake of the nature of an illusion; that is to say, their existence pertains to a lesser order of reality that masks, by the various phenomena it gives rise to, its own lack of true selfhood.* This point of view corresponds with the

* One must remind the reader that current loose speaking has practically converted the word "illusion" into a synonym of "unreal"; and this in turn has given rise to frequent misunderstandings on the subject of the Buddhist

attainment of a Nirvana still able to be regarded as one of the twin terms of an opposition, the other term being that state of Ignorance mentioned previously, whereby beings remain imprisoned in the Round and subject to change and suffering. Those who attain such a state of knowledge are usually referred to, in the Mahāyānist books, under the name of *Pratyeka Buddhas* (the Tibetan equivalent means *Self-Buddhas*), with whom are also coupled those whom the Tibetans call "hearers" (in Sanskrit known as *Sravakas*) and who are supposed, though somewhat unfairly, to represent the devotees of the rival or Hīnayānist school, that to which the southern Buddhists, those of Ceylon and Burma, belong. These two types have provided a favourite target for criticism on the part of all the Mahāyānist writers, whose mention of them has come to constitute a kind of refrain, a matter of "method," probably, rather than one to be taken as referring to actual facts. Thus it is said that the *Sravakas* and *Pratyeka Buddhas* rest content with deliverance as far as they themselves are concerned (hence the name *Self-Buddhas*), but fail to include in their point of view all their fellow beings still condemned to flounder in the whirlpool of the Round; in other words, they succeed in breaking loose from the world and its illusion, but they are unable to reintegrate it positively, stopping short, as they do, at negation. For such as they, therefore, Nirvana, though undoubtedly attained in one sense, yet remains essentially as the *Non-Round;* just as the Round itself continues to be similarly regarded as *Non-Nirvana,* without any means being found of reducing the contrasted concepts to unity. Thus the withdrawal of attention from the world as such, which marks a legitimate and indeed a necessary stage in the process of enlightenment, if it should ever be taken for a final term, can land one in an intellectual blind alley, bringing about a kind of lofty self-imprisonment, a withdrawal into a blissful supra-consciousness which yet implies privation of the one essential thing, since it stops short of the supreme non-duality.

Thirdly and lastly, there is the point of view (if one can still describe as such what is really a total synthesis embracing all possible points of view) of Bodhisattvahood, whereby the es-

teachings about the illusory nature of the world and its contents. Nothing can ever be opposable to reality: something that is truly unreal cannot enjoy any kind of existence, not even in imagination; whereas an illusion is something that makes game of the senses of an observer by seeming to possess a character other than its own; typically, by appearing more self-sufficient than it really is.

sential non-duality of the Round, symbolized by Form, and of Nirvana, symbolized by Voidness, is clearly perceived, ~~and~~ a Knowledge compared with which ~~Knowledge~~, as a typical Mahāyānist writer would probably have added, "all the virtues and achievements of countless millions of *Pratyeka Buddhas* and *Sravakas* during successive æons are nothing worth." This supreme realization, goal of the spiritual life, goes under the name of the *Prajna Paramitā* or Wisdom Transcendent (the Tibetans actually give it as "the transcending of Wisdom"); and a Bodhisattva is one who has succeeded in realizing this doctrine *effectively*, so that it can be said that possession of the *Prajna Paramitā* constitutes the characteristic *note* by which the Bodhisattva is to be known.* Once having realized it, and from the very fact of having done so, the Bodhisattva, though no longer involved in Existence under any law of necessity, freely decides – so the saying goes – "to remain in the Round as long as a single blade of grass shall remain undelivered from suffering," so that one and all may pass together through Nirvana's gates as the single, recollected Self that they already are in essence. Needless to say, however, the sentimentalism of the masses, even in Tibet, does not spare this doctrine altogether, for even there people will persist in reading into its symbolism some kind of moral lesson, according to which the Bodhisattva, in contrast to the selfish *Pratyeka Buddhas*, "refuses Nirvana," out of compassion for the beings (ourselves!) undergoing the painful experiences of the Round of Existence. Rightly interpreted, even such a coloured picture is not entirely devoid of ~~meaning~~ sense; its underlying implications are fairly clear, but naturally the tendency of simple minds is to take each detail separately and literally, thus sacrificing the unity of the idea in favour of some version more in accord with their own individualistic bias.

There is, however, one difficulty of interpretation which does actually arise from the fact that, according to the usual convention, Bodhisattvahood denotes the state penultimate to the attainment of Buddhahood and not the supreme realization itself. Thus it is said that the Bodhisattva "takes possession" of the fi-

* There is a famous formula that expresses this doctrine as concisely as possible; it is taken from a book bearing the same title of *Prajna Paramitā* and runs as follows:

"Form (it is) void:
The Void Itself (is) form."

By these words the Supreme Identity is given expression, hence this formula may be regarded as an epitome of all Knowledge. In translation, the unavoidable introduction of the word "is," wanting in the Tibetan version, destroys a great deal of the force of the original.

nal revelation that makes of him a Buddha, and similarly the Buddha is spoken of as having been "still a Bodhisattva" at such and such a time. In face of what has been said above it may well be asked how a Bodhisattva can ever be regarded as inferior in status to a Buddha, seeing that Bodhisattvahood, as we have already seen, corresponds by definition to the state of one who not only has realized the Void, in a transcendent sense, but also has realized it in the World itself, in an immanent sense, this double realization (as we are still forced to describe it) being for him not twofold but one and only. It is evident that the attainment of this, the supreme unitive Knowledge, is in fact that which constitutes Nirvana or Buddhahood, so that it is difficult to see how Bodhisattvahood can be referred to as a penultimate state at all – yet the very existence of the two separate terms must be intended to correspond to some reality in spite of an apparent redundancy affecting their use, at least in certain contexts.

The solution appears to lie in a twofold use of the name Bodhisattva itself. In the first place it can be used more loosely, in order to denote the all-but-perfected saint, on the threshold of Buddhahood, or even any unusually saintly person – I was told, for instance, that "we will find you 'a Bodhisattva' to be your teacher." In the second place it can be used in reference to one who is identical with Buddha by right of Knowledge, but who, in the exercise of his work of salvation for the benefit of creatures, *recapitulates* some of the stages of the Way *for exemplary reasons*, as a "shower of the Way." * In that sense he redescends into the Round rather than remains in it, though the latter may be the impression produced on the minds of beings, ever prone to be deceived by external appearances. One then has to do with an *Avatāra* (to use the well-known Sanskrit term); that is to say, with a specific descent of the Principle into Manifestation, a descent – to quote the words of Ānanda Coomaraswamy – of the Light of Lights, as *a* light but not as another Light. As I have just pointed out, such a descent implies the assumption of a limit – in other words, of an individual form, or of something analogous if the descent were to take place into a world other than our own, defined, as it would then be, by another set of conditions; but such a self-limiting need not shock us, since the realization of the *Prajna Paramitā*, of the essential non-duality of the Void and Form, obviously carries with it the power of assuming any and every form at

* This title is one that is habitually bestowed on the Buddha Himself.

will, as well as no form. Thus it is written of him who is established in the Knowledge of *Kun-ji*, the All-Principle, that "there will be no end of my *Avatāras*, who will appear in inconceivable millions of numbers and shapes, and who will adopt various methods suitable for the control of every kind of being."

At this point it may be advisable to guard against a possible misunderstanding as being one likely to arise in consequence of certain prevailing tendencies of present-day thought. That such might well be the case is evidenced by the following question that was recently put to me by a friend who asked whether, according to the precedent of the Bodhisattva's non-withdrawal from the Round of Existence, one was not justified in regarding as fundamentally sound the attitude of the man who says that he is prepared to make the best of the world as he finds it, enjoying life as far as he can, without troubling his head overmuch with thoughts of the beyond and the hereafter; was this not an indication of a more realistic outlook, it was asked, than the "other-worldliness" of the typically religious view of life?

At a first examination it might indeed appear that those who argue thus are not entirely at fault. Nevertheless, there is a fallacy lurking behind the question so put, even without taking into account the mixture of motives behind it, motives that are bound up with a hankering, on the part of the modern world, after a belief that the fruits of spirituality can be enjoyed without renouncing certain cherished habits and prejudices of an egocentric individualistic nature; while there sometimes also enters in a certain not entirely ununderstandable feeling of sympathy for the good-natured tolerance of the man who is prepared to live and let live, as contrasted with the narrow exclusiveness that so frequently mars the purity of a professedly religious outlook.

The real defect in the argument, however, is of quite a different order from these superficial matters of feeling, residing as it does in a false assimilation made on the strength of a purely specious similarity between the attitude of the amiable, easy-going, and common-sensical person already mentioned and that of the Bodhisattva, with his realization of universal non-duality. The two cases differ fundamentally for the simple reason that in the first instance the world is accepted *passively* – that is to say, is taken at its face value, under the aspect of separativity extending to everything within it, without any serious attempt being made to reduce things to unity through the

knowledge of a principle superior to their multiplicity and distinction. The phenomenal reality of the world is thus treated as if it were valid in its own right; in other words, it is considered from the point of view of Ignorance, and this is as true in the case of a man who tries to make the best of things as of a confirmed pessimist. At most one has to do with a more amiable brand of profanity, as compared with what is obviously a more disagreeable one.

Such a view of things does in fact start off by ignoring what is a prime condition for any aspirant towards Bodhisattvahood; namely, an understanding of the essentially impermanent character of the world and its contents, not merely in a theoretical sense, as when one studies a doctrine through books, nor in an "ideal" sense, through developing a kind of vague sympathy for that same doctrine, but effectively, so that the knowledge in question may take root in one's very being, causing the apparent self-sufficiency of separate objects to lose all its fascination for the mind; for only when attention has been thus withdrawn from whatever is fragmentary and perishable will it be possible to become poised in "one-pointed" contemplation of That which alone possesses the true nature of Selfhood, "being unto Itself its own sufficient Cause."

The lama Gyaltsan at P'hiyang had repeatedly said to me that without an effective grasp of the Doctrine of Impermanence all further progress in the Way was an impossibility: in that negating of all that is in itself negative (because regarded in abstraction from its principle – note the use of the double negative resulting in an affirmation) is to be found the clue to the mystery. It can thus be readily understood that if the Bodhisattva is free to remain in the world for the sake of the creatures still subject to the delusion of separativity, he does so with his eyes open. Where they see "other" things all around them, things that seem to them only too solid and substantial, he only perceives their voidness, or in other words their lack of genuine Self-nature. Multiple forms that, to the creature, appear opaque and self-contained have become for him of such perfect transparency as to reveal, or to veil no longer (note the double use of a selfsame root) the supreme Thatness, *devoid* as it is of all particularization, restriction, relativity, distinction, and the like. Nay, more, to his singleness of eye, the negative voidness of worldly objects and the positive Voidness that translates a freedom from form and all other limiting conditions are but one Voidness unqualified, coinciding in that ultimate

Reality concerning which all one dares to say is "Not this, not this."

Whereas the profane man, the "ordinary person," is in the Round by compulsion of mediate causes, "under the law" as St. Paul would have said, the Bodhisattva is there but "playfully," that is to say freely, in virtue of his identification with ~~the Primal Cause of All~~ THAT, which being alone absolutely unlimited is also alone absolutely free. Where the former submits to the world and its ways, with or without a semblance of willingness, but in any case in passive mode, the latter may be said to reintegrate the world in active mode; while somewhere midway between these two positions can be placed the *Pratyeka Buddha* (with whom the common run of religious-minded persons might be associated, since their aim of a personal salvation is in many ways comparable with his, though on a ~~somewhat~~ lower plane), of whom it can be said that he has effectively rejected the bonds of worldly existence (in realizing its impermanence), but has stopped short of reintegrating it. In his case it is rather Nirvana that is accepted in passive mode, as against the Bodhisattva's realization, which is active through and through to the point of melting away every factor of opposition in the ultimate crucible of non-dual knowledge. Thus, for him, the realization of the impermanence of the world and the eventual reintegration of that world hang together; the first, leading to Knowledge of the universal voidness, corresponds to Wisdom, and the second, symbolised by the Bodhisattva's Compassion, corresponds to Method, this twofold realization being, as already mentioned, the "note" by which true Bodhisattvahood can be recognized – but by a Bodhisattva only, be it understood, since no one else is qualified for such an act of recognition, which can be arrived at by no inferential process, but only as the outcome of an infallible and direct perception – and any omission of the former realization will preclude all possibility of attaining the latter. This disposes of any claims made on behalf of the man who attempts to integrate either himself or the world without at the same time fathoming their impermanence in more than just the superficial sense of a theoretical admission that everything must some day have an end. It was important to clear up this point before returning to the consideration of the Bodhisattva as he appears from the standpoint of humanity – that is to say, under the inevitable fragmentation into aspects that goes with any view short of his own all-embracing comprehension. From

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the point of view of individual beings, that aspect of his realization which strikes them most vividly is his Compassion, the fundamental character of which has, so one hopes, been made somewhat clearer as a result of the foregoing rather long-drawn-out theoretical explanations.

It must be repeated that this "Cosmic Charity" (to borrow an expressive term belonging to the Islamic doctrine) is something essentially different from the ordinary human feelings of pity, hopelessly tangled, as they usually are, with self-pity; though it would also be true to say that whatever is genuine in human pity is a reflection, at the individual level, of the limitless compassion flowing out of the Bodhisattva's heart, for which reason even that feeling is able to be taken for an adequate symbol of its universal prototype. It is also good to remember that perfect charity is not a quality opposable to justice, to order or harmony in the widest sense, since its realization is an impossibility in default of an equally perfect impartiality or "non-attachment." Towards the suffering beings in the Round, severally drugged with the three poisons of Anger, Desire-Attachment, and Ignorance, the Bodhisattva, like the good physician that he is, will exercise his merciful office not with a view to the mere assuaging of symptoms that leave the more deep-seated causes of the disease untouched; but in the manner most conducive to his patient's real recovery he will be prepared to employ every kind of "skilful means," which may at times partake of the severest character, and he will show himself under every conceivable aspect, from the gentlest to the most appalling, nor will he stop short at any ministration however pleasant or however rigorous until, as the saying goes, "the last blade of grass shall have attained Deliverance."

This lesson is clearly brought out in the iconographical representation of the various Bodhisattvas, such as are displayed on the walls of every temple, for they are made to appear not merely under their benign or attractive forms but also in a guise no less fearsome to behold. Even the All-Merciful Chenrezig himself, the supreme protector of Tibet and explicit type of a Buddha's mercy, possesses his complementary form of *Nagpo-Chhenpo*, the Great Black One; similarly, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, *Jamyang*, can also appear sometimes as *Dorje-Djigched*, the Ever-subsisting Maker of Fear, chosen to be the chief tutelary of the Yellow-Hatted Order, this aspect being depicted as a most terrible apparition, many-headed and provided with countless limbs, clasped in the arms of his equally

bloodthirsty Consort-Energy and dancing ecstatically upon the prostrate bodies of men and animals, whose ignorance makes them his victims. Those who are able to penetrate into the symbolism of this redoubtable double of the All-Wise One will also know that his dance is no other than the Round of Existence itself and his kingdom the very process of becoming. If the presence of an individual form, with the restrictions that this implies, spells a proportionate measure of suffering for the being concerned, that suffering (which must of course be interpreted in the widest possible sense of the word) can itself be considered under either of the two complementary aspects of justice and mercy: under the first, because privation, such as is implied by the existence of a limit of any kind, produces suffering of its own accord, because, fundamentally, the suffering *is* the privation and not something added to it by way of retributive sanction or otherwise – though at a certain level of realization such a symbolism is both theoretically legitimate as well as useful practically when considered from the point of view of the being's own spiritual development; under the second, because suffering, in so far as it leads men into self-questioning, is able to become a pointer towards the spiritual path, being thus indeed counted as the first of the Four Truths that together constitute the Buddha's call to a radical change of heart, to that *metanoesis* which is so inadequately rendered by the word "repentance" with its implicitly sentimental notion of regret. Viewed under such an aspect, therefore, suffering must be regarded first and foremost as part of the mechanism of a merciful providence, but for which there would be small hope of deliverance for anyone. It is not a question of trying to explain away the facts of suffering "optimistically" by resorting to the use of a euphemistic phraseology, but of showing the place that it occupies in relation to the aspect of divine Clemency, as well as its more obvious connexion with the complementary aspect of Rigour.

The above considerations also have some bearing on a point that often has worried European students of Eastern doctrines, who fail to understand how desire, whether admitted to play the leading part in the Round of Existence ascribed to it by Buddhism or not, can ever come to be extinguished in a being, since it is evident that it cannot be restrained by sheer will-power such as can only stop short at dealing with the action prompted by this or that desire, either by way of impulsion or repression, whereas the desire itself will have arisen, in the

first place, out of the substratum of the being's unconsciousness where the will is inoperative; this quite apart from the fact that the nature of Will itself is too closely related to that of Desire pure and simple to provide an entirely adequate instrument for its control. For the average Western mind, with its habit of concentrating all its attention on problems of moral casuistry – that is to say, on questions concerning the right or wrong use of will-power in respect of actions – the Buddha's teaching on the subject of desire and its cessation is apt to prove extremely puzzling.

Yet this side of the doctrine is not so abstruse as to defy at least a theoretical grasp of the principles underlying it. What is usually missed in the argument is the fact that, just as in the case of suffering, unsatisfied desire, though in one sense an evil in that it interposes a distraction between the being and its realization of unity, is also just (therefore a good) in so far as it genuinely registers a lack of something – the pertinent question is a lack of what? In fact all our separate desires are proportioned exactly to the measure of our privation of the One Essential, and if we treat different things as successively desirable or the reverse, this habit arises from a failure to understand that nothing whatsoever can be called desirable excepting only *The* Desirable; whence it is easy to see that the extinction of all desire and its fulfilment hang together, in exactly the same sense as death to self (the "self-denial" of the Gospels) and birth to the Self spell one and the same thing. Our alternate loves and hates, from the most trivial to the most noble or ignoble, are, one and all, an unconscious tribute laid by Ignorance at the feet of Knowledge, so that, in that sense, they once again are as much an expression of the Divine Mercy (because their attendant suffering is the factor that continually impels a being to seek a way of liberation) as they are an expression of the Divine Rigour through the privation registered by their very presence, which constitutes its own automatically operative sanction.

Let us return, however, to the consideration of the symbolism behind the great variety of forms described in the Tantric books or otherwise occurring in works of art of Tantric inspiration, a symbolism that, moreover, provides a most important *technical* resource for the practice of the various spiritual disciplines attached to the Tantric doctrines, both Hindu and Buddhist. Thus one is led to see that the kindlier aspects can, when necessary, be made to function as their own apparent opposites,

by which means both the complementarism and the interpenetration of the aspects of mercy and severity are vividly brought out, only to be succeeded by the coincidence of those same two aspects in a "two-less" identity that dissolves all the force of their opposition. Again and again the symbolical relationships are reversed in an unending play of antithesis and identification, as attractive forms give way to fierce ones, the most repellent features of which are, however, in their turn found to represent the characteristic attributes of the benign aspect and so on; until in the end, by dint of alternate manifestation, interchange and dissolution of forms,* Form itself loses its restrictive power over the mind of the devotee, leaving him henceforth free to contemplate through the eye of true Intelligence the non-duality of That which is to be known by those who find the way to carry their solitude ever with them, even in the world. So is one brought back once again to the Bodhisattva's knowledge, whereby the immanent is seen to be ultimately indistinguishable from the transcendent, the phenomenal from the real, the world of forms from the Void Itself. In all this there is never a question of any "monistic" or "pantheistic" confusion – one is bound to mention this point in view of repeated attempts to foist these purely Western notions, modern at that, upon Oriental thought, from a variety of motives – but of the realization of a unity which is called "two-less" from the very fact that in it all things are essentially "fused but not confused," to quote a phrase of Meister Eckhard.

This two-less Knowledge, possession of which constitutes the Sage, is as the warp to the entire weft of Tibetan tradition. One encounters it at every turn, now more explicit, now at once veiled and revealed by symbols, now faintly echoed in the thoughts and words of quite simple people, like a theme that unfolds itself in continual self-pursuit through an endless series of episodes and modulations, a fugue that will not modulate into its final close "so long as one insect or one blade of grass remains undelivered from the Round." The Bodhisattva provides the specific type of the spiritual life in Tibet, and it is in such terms that the idea of "sanctity" is always interpreted in all the lands where the lamaic tradition holds sway.

* The reader is again referred to the details given in the long quotation towards the end of Chapter xv. This text is typical of its kind, and is taken from a book primarily designed to serve as a practical manual for initiates working under direction of a qualified teacher or *guru;* the underlying aim of the discipline to which that theory serves as a key is a personal realization to be arrived at by means of the applied symbolism.

Space does not allow of anything like a comprehensive survey of the manifold applications to which the conception of Bodhisattvahood has given rise in all orders; nor would such an attempt work out profitably for the reader, since it could only result in leaving the essential idea snowed under a mass of indigestible, if separately interesting detail; the important thing to grasp, however, is that it is this doctrine that gives its form to the idea of spirituality as conceived in all the Tibetan world, especially under its two principial aspects of Compassion and Skilful Means. Sufficient has been said concerning what the former is or is not for little room to be left for misunderstanding as to the nature of this characteristic trait of the Bodhisattva; while in regard to the latter one can only point out the fact that the saint, in Tibet, is regarded first and foremost as one endowed with "skill," as it were an "artist in spirituality," and only secondarily under the aspect of individual goodness. Here one sees a certain difference of point of view, as between the Buddhist and the ordinary Christian picture of sainthood, bound up with the degrees of emphasis respectively given to ethical and intellectual values. Not that one wishes to suggest the existence of a fundamental incompatibility between the two conceptions; all that need be pointed out is that in the Buddhist tradition the practice of those portions of "the Eightfold Path" that relate to action and moral behaviour in general, though considered indispensable just as in the case of the sister tradition, are on the whole taken for granted when speaking of the saints, the chief attention in their case being drawn to the purely intellectual virtue of Perfect Contemplation, which forms the climax of the eightfold catalogue; whereas with Christianity, though its teaching on the supremacy of Contemplation over Action does not differ in principle from that of the Oriental traditions, there has been a certain tendency, much increased in modern times through the intrusion of "humanism" (itself an anti-Christian movement), to overstress individual and especially social considerations. Moreover, abuses apart, such a tendency always goes to a certain extent with the "religious" as compared with the purely metaphysical point of view, influencing not only popular conceptions but also many perfectly orthodox formulations of the doctrine itself.

Two examples will have to suffice as illustrations of the workings of the Bodhisattva idea in the spiritual life of the Tibetans. The one applies to the people at large, though admittedly at

many different degrees of comprehension; the other to those who have proceeded a considerable way in the direction of realization, or at least whose aspirations and efforts are definitely set in that direction. The first example is taken from the widespread practice of invocation, usually on a rosary, of the *Mani* formula already mentioned in earlier chapters, which itself embodies a traditional communication the origin of which goes back to the Bodhisattva Chenrezig, the Patron of Tibet, for whose influence the person of the Dalai Lama himself serves as a focus.

When a person is about to begin saying his rosary he often preludes his reciting of the actual formula by a short dedicatory verse in honour of Chenrezig, its originator, addressed to him under his alternative name of the All-Compassionate. After this follows the repetition of the *Mani*, for a longer or shorter time, with more or less concentration as the case may be. When these devotions are finished, the invoking person (who incidentally will have been the recipient of a minor initiation qualifying him to use this particular ritual support) concludes with another short verse, the gist of which is as follows: "By the merit of this (invocation) to (my)self having accrued (i.e., by my having realized) the power of Chenrezig, may beings without a single exception be established in the land of the Norm (a periphasis for the supreme realization)." However attentively or carelessly these thoughts may be uttered, they contain an explicit as well as implicit reference to the "Bodhisattva's vow" not to enter Nirvana before all beings have been delivered from the Round and its suffering; the important thing to note is that this rite postulates a point of view that does not stop short at a personal deliverance, like that for which the *Pratyeka Buddhas* are constantly being reproached, since it goes as far as actually to envisage the redescent into the world with a view to its eventual reintegration in the Principle. That it should be possible for a conception of this order to be attached to a rite as popular as the *Mani* has become in Tibet is extremely significant.

Naturally too much must not be read into the above statement; the fact is that Tibetans, like other people, do often dream of spending more or less prolonged periods of care-free enjoyment in other and happier worlds, such as the Western Paradise presided over by Chenrezig and his teacher the Buddha Amitabha. The simple-minded likewise indulge in visions of a happy rebirth in a literal sense here on earth, forgetful as

they are of the oft-quoted phrase declaring "the individual(ity) to be perishable, and devoid of true self(hood)": yet the fact remains that even in the case of a rite so generally practised the expressed intention goes far beyond the individual order – indeed, to the point of embracing the totality of beings and worlds in a single universal synthesis in which individual distinctions find no place, so that one can justly claim that the *metaphysical horizon* against which the rite is to be performed is literally limitless by its own showing and that no concession of principle has actually been made by way of encouraging self-interest of the ordinary kind.

All that now remains is to speak of those who stand at the other end of the intellectual scale from the many simple people who, in comparative unconsciousness, give utterance to the Bodhisattva's awe-inspiring vow as they finish telling the beads of their rosaries. I am thinking of those persons (and they are by no means rare in Tibet) who have felt the call to self-dedication in the spiritual life so imperatively as to be unable to divide their energies any further, as between the pursuit of the supreme knowledge and ordinary private interests of whatever order. These people commonly go under the name of *naldjorpas*, meaning "obtainers of tranquillity," because they have cut themselves free of the multi-directional pulls of a life lived more or less profanely, leaving themselves in a state of "one-pointed" contemplation that no distraction coming from outside is henceforward able to disturb. This wholehearted expression of the yearning for sainthood will provide us with our second example, which can, however, only be described in the most general terms, since one who has not himself experienced, at least in a high degree, the descent of the Bodhisattva into his own heart is unfitted to offer any really profound comment on the subject; and the same applies to his hearers, who unless they are able, by resorting to the appropriate means, to approach a similar realization, will be equally incapable of understanding the deeper significance of the doctrine offered to them. All that one can be concerned with here is not so much the nature of the *naldjorpa's* experience in itself – about which I am not qualified to pronounce – as the part which that experience, whatever may be its nature, plays in the Tibetan tradition as a whole and what kind of influence it represents in regard to giving its specific form to the idea of sainthood lived according to the Bodhisattva pattern.

One reservation must be made, however; not everyone

loosely described as a *naldjorpa* is so effectively, and due allowance must be made for some who, though possibly qualified to embrace the life of spiritual abandonment, have for one reason or another strayed from the strait and narrow path, whether by yielding to the lure of unusual psychic and physical powers (such as often develop incidentally as a result of following certain disciplines) or from any other cause equally contingent.* These people, though they may continue to style themselves *naldjorpas* and be accepted as such, have really arrived at an intellectual dead end, or even worse in some cases. Nevertheless, the real thing not only exists, but it is that element which, above all, lends colour to the whole spiritual life in Tibet, constituting, as it were, the *axis* in relation to which all else must be situated and ultimately judged.

The genuine *naldjorpa*, in principle as in practice, stands outside the pale of society, so much so that if he has been a monk he usually casts off the monastic habit (and the rule it represents) as a sign that he has cut adrift from all that goes with organized existence, letting "the wind that bloweth where it listeth" carry him in whatever direction it will. Often he is to be met with among the hermits dwelling on the edge of the great glaciers, or else wandering along one of the many tracks that lead hither and thither across the plateau, and even sometimes, as at Lachhen for instance, staying quietly not far from human dwellings, in fairly close touch with social life though no longer involved in it; or if he be so minded, there is nothing to prevent him from seemingly participating in outward activities, of whatever nature, always provided that his solitude of spirit be such as to make it a matter of indifference to him where he is or what he is supposed to be doing or not doing.

Most, if not all, of these contemplatives are initiates of some particular spiritual line, of which a number exist, each having certain methods peculiar to it and requiring of its sons – one must not call them "members" – various special qualifications, apart from the general qualification that is implied in all initi-

* Professed spiritual seekers of European origin seem especially prone to develop an unhealthy interest in extraordinary phenomena of all kinds, and that despite the calculated warnings of so many of the great teachers of both East and West. An innate curiosity as well as an experimentalism that is constantly being stimulated by modern "scientific" training and propaganda is largely responsible for this tendency, which is only too apt to turn into an insatiable craving, as a result of which the person concerned, when he does not suffer serious psychological perversion, at least becomes fatally imprisoned in the world of appearances and in an egocentric enjoyment of marvels, real or supposed.

ability. Through an unbroken traditional succession from master to pupil, each such line may be said to constitute a separate current of spiritual influence, a channel that after issuing from the same parent stream will by and by go to lose itself, with all the others, in the uncharted ocean, large as the Bodhisattva's compassion, which is called Knowledge of the Voidness.

One misconception must be avoided, however, since it is likely to arise with certain habits of mind and since it also makes a peculiarly subtle appeal: the Bodhisattva's vow must never be taken to imply that the saving of mankind, or even of all creation, should become *an end in itself* for the apprentice in spirituality. Nothing short of the naked Truth, shorn of all contingencies and restrictions, merits to be called Desirable, its pursuit alone can be called Activity unqualified; only one who has been stripped of his attachments to everything except the Truth without a rival or associate can hope to attain it. Having attained it, he does, in fact, become qualified to save the world, but should he at any stage yield to the supremely diabolical temptation (the one offered by Satan to Christ upon the high mountain) of making the world's salvation into his first aim, then he must pay the price of his altruistic idolatry and remain irremediably chained to the world and its otherness. A hair separates the two positions, and one can only recall in this connexion the remark quoted earlier to the effect that saving the world is the Bodhisattva's play. The danger I have been speaking of represents the ultimate temptation of the saint, being both the hardest to detect and the most fatal if it is yielded to. This principle is, moreover, operative not only at the highest level but even at inferior levels too; to causes of this order must be ascribed the non-success that, in so large a measure, attends the well-meaning and often strenuous efforts of humanitarianly inclined people the world over, for it is their very obsession with the cause of "others" that spells defeat from the start, in spite of their own obvious sincerity.

Tibetans, on the other hand, even comparatively ignorant ones, seem to have retained some grasp of the principle at work; they look upon the *naldjorpas* as being first and foremost the protectors of humanity, without whose "actionless" activity the ship of mankind would irremediably founder. Unentangled, as they are, in either duties or rights, whether of the family or the state or of a professional kind, it is their very impartiality towards worldly affairs that constitutes their power, in which

all those who are still, to a greater or lesser extent, "involved" by various ties of an individual and social order also participate, if indirectly. For this reason, it would appear not so much wicked as *suicidal* if society were, on any plea, to try to place restrictions in the way of those who wish to join the ranks of this spiritual élite, even while admitting that those ranks will contain a certain proportion of self-deceived persons and even some who are minded to make capital of the reverence in which they are held by the people at large.

Moreover, no one would even think of impertinently questioning the motives or methods of anyone so engaged. Every Tibetan understands that sainthood, at any degree of realization, will imply a different set of values from those that govern the judgment of the ordinary man: what the latter regards as important and obvious will often, to the spiritually minded, seem trivial and, in any case, highly contestable. Indeed, the last statement itself betrays an inaccuracy: for one who *knows* by the direct insight born of realization the kind of questions that trouble the ignorant do not even arise, nor do they enter into the realm of choice or discussion. True intelligence goes straight to the mark and requires no tortuous marshalling of pros and cons to bolster up its conclusions. Nothing would seem more illogical to the Tibetan mind than to expect the same kind of judgment from a Knower, even from one who is so to a partial extent only, and an ignoramus, which, in the deepest sense, is the state of the majority of mankind, including most of those whom the world looks on as learned or powerful or ~~active~~ efficient, for it is they, and those who admire and follow them, who are the truly impractical visionaries, as compared with the *naldjorpa*, who is the unshakable realist because like Mary in the Gospel "he hath chosen that good part."

It must not be thought that this recognition of the freedom to be earned through following the spiritual path will imply any kind of antinomianism, though some may have been tempted to think so. A realization that places one in a state of complete harmony with the source of all law can dispense one from its manifold applications but cannot oppose one to it in principle; moreover it is knowledge that provides a valid sanction for all applications on the legal plane (I am referring to law in the very widest sense of the word), and not vice versa. At the very highest level, therefore, the realization that "His service is perfect freedom," from being merely theoretical becomes effective, and one who attains this state can rightly

claim that he is no longer "under the law," but is, as the Hindus would say, henceforth "beyond caste."

The foregoing remark, however, gives rise to another, no less important in its way, since it affects those people – and they are not a few – who have come to yearn for a life of non-attachment, but who think that they will attain it by a premature and purely external casting-off of the bonds of form, whether religious or other. This state of mind on the part of the would-be "mystic" * is frequently evidenced by the habit of ceaselessly tilting at "orthodoxy," professedly in the name of "the spirit" as against "the letter," and by an instinctive fear and suspicion of whatever pertains to the formal order in general. Into this attitude of mind many different elements have entered in – individualism, sentimentalism, and other modernistic influences. What these people miss is the fact that there are two ways of being outside form, the one supra-formal, because form has been transcended, the other infra-formal, because its possibilities as a "support" of realization at a certain level have been neglected. The one gives access to the formless truth, seat of freedom and universality, the other represents the most abysmal kind of ignorance, compared with which the formal attachments affecting even the most narrow-minded person must be looked upon as a state of comparative liberty. Form, to be transcended, must first of all be realized and thus integrated; it is impossible to *skip* the experience of form, and the wish to do so, in the name of personal liberty, merely betrays a futile kind of self-conceit. This temptation is especially strong among Western advocates of a return to spiritual values at the present moment, by reason of the individualistic turn of their minds, fostered in the course of their education. On this whole subject of form a great confusion of thought has occurred, which has not spared even those who appear, in other respects, to be highly gifted. What so many people refuse to face is the fact

* Throughout this book any careless use of the term "mystic" and its derivatives has been carefully avoided. Whatever meaning this word may originally have borne, later and, more especially, recent usage has so confused the issue as to make it impossible of application outside the sphere where it belongs historically; namely, that of Christian theology coupled with certain modes of realization attached to the same. When, as now so often happens, the term is stretched to cover the Oriental traditions, its employment becomes not only loose but positively misleading, in that it suggests a close parallelism, if not an identity, as between things pertaining to very different orders, which, if they resemble one another at all, do so in respect of features that are largely external and superficial. To speak, as so many do, of a Tibetan or Indian or Islamic mysticism is therefore both inappropriate in point of fact and otherwise undesirable by reason of the false assimilations to which it can give rise.

that in a time of intellectual confusion form, "the letter," is almost the last life-line uniting fallen man with the sources of his spirituality, so that it would be about true to say that today it matters more to observe forms correctly than to be "good" – a hard saying, perhaps, and a paradox, but one worth pondering over.

In a country like Tibet – that is to say, anywhere in the wide world where the continuity of tradition still remains substantially unbroken – an intending *naldjorpa* will necessarily set out on his journey from a point situated somewhere in a traditional whole all the constituent forms of which will themselves already have been moulded or, as one might have said, *informed* under the influence of the selfsame idea that he is in process of realizing integrally and beyond every limitation of form: for this is in fact what tradition means – it is time people were reminded of it – namely, an effective communication of principles of more-than-human origin, whether indirectly and at several removes, through use of the forms that will have arisen by applying those principles to contingent needs, or else immediately, after an "exhausting" of whatever makes for formal restriction of any kind, including the human individuality itself.

Thus the true *naldjorpa* (after whom the aspirant is similarly named only in anticipation and, as it were, by courtesy) is both he who realizes fully and effectively what others at best learn only partially through the various theoretical formulations of the doctrine as well as through their own participation in the traditional institutions in general, and also he who, in having thus realized it, himself becomes at one with the eternal fountainhead of tradition; for him his approach to the goal is rather in the nature of a homecoming, a recollection, than a fresh acquisition in the spiritual field; while, on its side, the tradition, as revealed through the line of realized sages and their successors, is but a redescent, spontaneously undertaken, into that same world of men whence the *naldjorpa* had originally started on his way, in the days of his comparative ignorance. The intimate interconnexion between the two functions is not difficult to perceive.

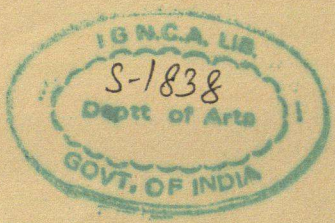
Nor is it difficult to recognize the prototype of which this picture is a tracing: the twofold course of outgoing and return, which true insight knows as "not-two," the laborious ascent towards the highest eminences of awareness and the "compassionate" redescent into the valley, is not all this but another ver-

sion of the oft-told tale of Bodhisattvahood presently renewed, whereby it is also made plain that Tradition is itself an aspect of that providential redescent into the Round, one of the "skilful means" wherewith the Bodhisattva "playfully" works for creatures? A traditionless existence, whether for a single individual or a whole group, is one in which the presence of the Bodhisattva passes unnoticed, in which the *naldjorpa* is without honour, in which mankind, refusing to listen to any talk of self-abandonment, is abandoned to its own devices, as the very name of "humanism" so obviously confesses. This is the first of the lessons to be learned by a sojourn in the places where Tradition still prevails, where it has not yet been entirely forgotten that without the guidance, both direct and indirect, of those who have themselves taken possession of the summit, thus qualifying themselves, if need be, for a retracing of the way for the benefit of all the creatures whom "otherhood" still holds under its spell, the supreme peak will remain for ever unclimbable.

One can but repeat it: a personal reintegration in an authentically traditional form, as well as a "normal" participation in its attendant institutions, is an indispensable prelude to any adventure into the path of non-formal knowledge; by this means the individuality is conditioned, "tamed" as the Tibetans would say, in preparation for the supreme task that lies ahead. To those aspirants after the spiritual life who, in a purely negative sense at least, have come to reject the modern world and its profanity, but who, as far as any positive action is concerned, waver on the threshold perplexed by doubts as to the next step to be taken, to such as these the only advice that can be offered is the traditional one: namely, that they should first put themselves to rights as regards the formal order (wherein they are situated in virtue of the fact of being individuals at all) by regular adherence to a tradition; after which they should make use to the fullest extent of the means provided within the framework of that tradition, all the while testing their own success or otherwise by reference to its theory – that is, to its canonical formulations. Lastly, if and when a call to the beyond becomes irresistible, they should place themselves under the guidance of a spiritual master, the *guru* or "Root Lama," who is destined to introduce them into the path followed through the ages by the blessed company of the "thus-gone" (*Tathagatas*) – call them Buddhas, Yogis, Sufis, or what you will.

But one must beware of unauthorized teachers and bogus initiations; for the modern world has produced a heavy crop of

self-appointed free lances, mostly men who toy with the equivocal term "mysticism"; here again traditional "orthodoxy" is about the only available touchstone and safeguard, a case of form acting as a protective envelope for the formless, by lending it its body. But protection always will be purchased at the price of restriction – this rule holds good in all orders, including the social order – hence the danger of "idolatry," which precisely consists in ascribing to any form in itself the unqualified character that belongs alone to the integral and formless Truth. Anywhere short of the goal, the way of realization will imply a certain polar balance between these two conceptions, the provisional and "symbolical" validity of forms and the untrammelled freedom of voidness. The Way has been fittingly called "narrow" and compared to walking along a razor's edge: by describing His tradition as the Middle Way the Buddha was expressing a similar idea. Bodhisattvahood is the virtue of being freed from both horns of the eternal dilemma, Form *versus* Void, by realizing them alike in their common and essential twolessness. Likewise the Bodhisattva's compassionate mission for the sake of dwellers in the land of becoming is itself the free expression of that same non-dual Knowledge that is, for him, the source of his redemptive power as well as his own intrinsic qualification.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